

**Testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz
Government Administration & Elections Committee
February 5, 2007**

Good Afternoon Chairman Caruso, Chairwoman Slossberg and members of the GAE Committee. For the record, my name is Susan Bysiewicz and I am the Secretary of the State. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding several bills on your public hearing agenda.

First, I want to commend this Committee for consistently pursuing ethics reform and for publicly raising and hearing such significant state and municipal reform proposals. Our state has been through some very difficult times over the past several years. Scandals in both our state and municipal governments, and in both our executive and legislative branches, have damaged our credibility in the eyes of the public. Unfortunately, the actions of a select few have undermined the public's confidence in our system, weakening our democracy. It is our duty as elected officials to restore that priceless public trust.

Today, we are all here to take a positive step forward for Connecticut. As part of my overall legislative package, I have asked this Committee to raise a bill regarding strict municipal ethics reforms. In particular, I support the requirement that all municipalities establish a local ethics commission that would address ethical violations in their community.

While it is my preference that all municipalities be required to establish a local ethics commission, it is my understanding that this Committee and representatives of municipal governments have been working toward a sensible solution that will balance the needs of municipalities with improvements to the public's trust. This is a positive step forward and I commend those who are making this effort a reality.

Over the past decade, through your persistence, Connecticut has passed some of the strictest ethics and campaign finance laws in the country. Our municipalities have also had their share of difficult times. Extending sensible ethics reforms to local governments will further improve the public's confidence in our democracy. Many municipalities have already taken a bold step forward in addressing ethics reforms in their own community and I commend their courage and foresight. I strongly support legislation that would require all municipalities to follow strict ethical guidelines. Therefore, I support municipal ethics reforms outlined in the following bills:

H.B. No. 7000: An Act Concerning Municipal Ethics And Municipal Lobbying

H.B. No. 6016: An Act Requiring The Office Of State Ethics To Handle Municipal Ethics Complaints

It is important that we address municipal ethics reforms this legislative session. I have spent the last eight years working to increase voter registration, turnout and participation. Ethics reform on both the state and municipal levels is a priority of my administration and I join you in your efforts to seek change. I commend this Committee for raising these bills and I offer my assistance as you proceed debating this important issue.

In addition, I support **H.B. No. 7002: An Act Concerning Ethics**. As both the Chief Election Official for the State of Connecticut and as a former Chair of the Committee, I have been a longtime advocate of restoring the public's trust. I support the clarifications to our ethics laws found in this bill.

I also support **S.B. No. 533: An Act Concerning Gifts And Campaign Contributions Made To Elected Municipal Officials**.

It is vital that we extend to municipal officials the limit of gifts and campaign contribution restrictions that already apply to state officials. I would even make the argument that we should place even tighter restrictions on local officials since they are the front lines to our democracy in our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I am available to answer any questions that you may have.